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ABSTRACT

The development and implementation of a program to facilitate communication and improve working relationships between elementary school staff members is described. Methodology involved observation of inservice faculty training sessions and a participant survey. The program was based on three components: a series of faculty inservice workshops, additional team leader training, and concrete communication mechanism adjustments. Findings indicate that the level of communication and quality of collegial relationships improved, but did not achieve program objectives. Recommendations are made for increasing shared decision-making in the form of teacher-led committees, awarding teacher recertification credit, and providing flexible scheduling. Appendices include the survey, a list of need indicators, program syllabus, and staff distribution. (24 references) (LMI)

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IMPROVING COMMUNICATION AND COLLEGIAL RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STAFF

by

Carolyn E. Reynolds

A Practicum Report

Submitted to the Faculty of the Center for the Advancement of Education at Nova University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Educational Specialist.

The abstract of this report may be placed in a National Database System for reference.

May, 1990

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Authorship Statement

I hereby testify that this paper and the work it reports are entirely my own. Where it has been necessary to draw from the work of others, published or unpublished, I have acknowledged such work in accordance with accepted scholarly and editorial practice. I give this testimony freely, out of respect for the scholarship of other workers in the field and in the hope that my work, presented here, will earn similar respect.

Signed Carolyn E. Reynolds

ABSTRACT

Improving Communication and Collegial Relationships Within an Elementary School Staff. Reynolds, Carolyn E., 1990: Practicum Report, Nova University, The Center for the Advancement of Education.
Descriptors: Communication (Thought Transfer)/ Communication Research/Communication Skills/Group Communication/Decision Group Dynamics/Effective Schools/ Group Behavior/Interpersonal Relationship/Leadership/ Listening/Organizational Climate/Organizational Culture/ Organizational Effectiveness/Problem Solving/Team Training/

The author developed and implemented a program to facilitate communication and improve working relationships between members of an elementary school staff. The program consisted of three three components: 1) a series of inservice workshops for faculty to strengthen self- knowledge and understanding of others and to introduce effective communication skills; 2) additional training in team building for team leaders and 3) concrete adjustments in communication mechanisms. The results were mixed. The level of communication and collegial relationships improved, but not to the extent that had been set up in the design objectives. Appendices include communication survey, list of indicators used as measure of need, and outlines of inservice sessions and mechanical improvements put in place.

CHAPTER I

Purpose

The setting for this practicum is an elementary school in a mid-sized county (150,000 pop.) on the west coast of Florida. The school is located in a middle to upper middle class neighborhood that has traditionally been considered a preferred school district. The homes in the community range in value from $75,000 to $200,000 with a sprinkling of more expensive homes. The majority of the student population of 700 comes from families in this income level. Recently, there has been an influx of students from a large apartment complex built near the school. The families of these students are more transient and slightly less affluent than the more permanent population. In addition, the target school has approximately seven percent Black and Hispanic students who are bussed in for integration purposes. The school is also home to one class of emotionally disturbed children who are mainstreamed into the regular classrooms, and two Pre-K handicapped units serving approximately 15 children.

The school structure, built in 1956, has been well

maintained through the years, but is inadequate in size to accommodate the current population. Fourteen classes are presently housed in portables. A three million dollar renovation/enlargement project was begun in April, 1990 and is due for completion in late October.

The faculty is very well-trained and experienced. There are 38.5 teaching units and two administrative units in the building. (The organization of the staff is presented in Appendix A.) The staff also includes seven aides, three secretaries, five lunchroom workers and four custodians.

Among the teaching staff of 38.5 professionals, only three have taught less than three years. The average length of teaching experience for the faculty is 16 years. Twenty two have advanced degrees. Roughly 50 percent of the teachers have taught at the target school for 10 years or more. While this situation makes for a very stable staff; it also, in some instances, presents resistance to change and fosters isolation.

The writer of this paper has taught music in the district since 1968 and has been employed at the target school for the last nine years. The music

schedule includes 30 minutes of weekly instruction for every class in the school, weekly group sings for second and third grade classes, and choir and special recorder classes for fourth and fifth grade students. This schedule requires the music specialist to interact with each of the classroom teachers weekly, as well as working with them in preparing special programs for school and P.T.A.

In addition, the writer serves as team leader for all of the special area teachers--all those teaching units not assigned to regular K-5 classes. An additional assignment for the past four years has been the construction of the master schedule for "rainbow" classes (art, library, music and P.E.). Duties at the target school have made the writer keenly aware of the necessity for good communication between individuals, between groups of individuals, and between administration and staff in order for a school to function effectively as an educational unit.

Although the target school deservedly enjoys an excellent reputation in the community, it is presently undergoing a period of change that is causing considerable stress to the persons affected by it. Evidence of such stress is apparent in the teachers at

the target school, especially those (including the writer), who have taught in those periods where the individual teacher had much more freedom teacher to structure the content and agenda of the classroom day. As more and more emphasis is placed upon achievement as reflected in test scores, teachers feel pressure to focus their attention on basic subjects. At the same time, outside forces (such as the state legislature) are requiring the inclusion of many extra areas of study into the curriculum. All teachers are feeling the pressure of too much material to cover in too little time.

Added to this pressure is the frustration felt by many of the school's teachers who now find themselves teaching a completely different type of student than those with whom they have previously dealt. Teachers are also encountering a generation of parents whose values are far different from their own in respect to educational practices. The old ways of dealing with problems are often ineffective. Accustomed to the traditional isolation of the individual classroom, teachers are often reluctant to seek solutions outside of themselves or the school office. Lack of effective

communication and collaborative efforts between and within different grade levels strengthened feelings of isolation and intensified the stress which inevitably accompanies any change.

Traditionally, teachers in the target school had secured information concerning school business in a weekly faculty meeting led by the principal. As the school staff increased in both size and in diversity of responsibilities, and as district assignment of extra duties necessitated the principal's spending more time off campus, the weekly meeting often become difficult to schedule. As a result, the need for an effective system of communicating with the school staff became more noticeable.

The principal, in an effort to improve communication and to involve faculty members in decisions requiring immediate responses, initiated a weekly team leaders meeting. Information was then relayed to faculty members by their representatives, and meetings involving the entire faculty were held less often (usually once a month). Although this system did provide teachers with some input (through their team leaders) into decisions affecting them, it did little to build esprit de corps. Information not

passing through this structured communication system was usually transmitted by campus gossip. Those teachers who were not privy to information lines simply were not informed.

Also contributing to the communication problem within the professional staff (the target group in this practicum) was the lack of consensus as to a commonly held educational goal or school mission. The younger teachers who have become a part of the staff often hold philosophical views concerning education that differ from those held by some of the more mature personnel. Lack of communication and understanding between those holding differing views resulted in misunderstandings, not only between individuals, but also between groups of different persuasion.

In addition, there also seemed to exist among the staff a general lack of knowledge as to the purposes and functions of the support programs--the enrichment programs (art, media, music, P.E.) and the Exceptional Students Programs (emotionally handicapped, gifted, pre-K handicapped, severe learning disabilities, and speech). Consequently, many of the staff members working in these areas often felt alienated. More importantly, the scheduling of students into these

areas occasionally became a source of friction among staff members.

All of the above problems-feelings of isolation, misunderstandings arising from differences in educational philosophies and methods, and disputes over the importance of different programs affected the faculty morale, and consequently the students' educational progress. Barth (1986) maintains that:

> the nature of the relationships among the adults who inhabit a school has more to do with a school's quality and character, the accomplishments of its pupils, and the professionalism of its teachers than does any other factor. (p.122).

The psychic energies of the staff, which should be centered on student learning, were being partially depleted by the presence of the problems. This situation resulted in decreased productivity by teachers and students.

In an ideal situation an entire staff would reach consensus concerning a schoolwide educational vision (mission) for the school, and then work to make it a reality. Each staff member's contribution to the overall educational process would be understood and appreciated. In addition, every school employee would have immediate access to information necessary for successful job performance. Communication would become

be a unifying force as well as an important link in the school's performance system.

That such an ideal situation was not in place in the target school was documented in a survey of the professional staff of the school completed in March 1989. The survey, given district wide, was the New York State Effective Schools Consortium Survey of Professional Staff Perceptions of School Program (NYS, 1987). The items in the survey are statements relating to 11 characteristics which current research shows are an essential part of effective schools.

Subjects were asked to rate each item as to its importance, and the degree to which the condition described in the item existed in the target school. A mean discrepancy was then computed for each item. The 11 characteristics were rank ordered (1 through 10 in decreasing degree of their existence), as were the individual items within each characteristic. The result was a profile of the school, as perceived by the professional staff, in relation to the effective schools criteria. This profile was intended for use as a planning tool by the school leadership team in its efforts to effect school improvement.

After studying the results of the survey, the principal organized a school improvement team (S.I.T.), composed primarily of grade level team leaders, to discuss and propose solutions for schoolwide problems that the profile pinpointed. Lack of a coordinated discipline policy and the evidence of a poor school climate (especially faculty morale) were the two areas that had, according to the survey, generated most concern among the staff. As its first task, the group undertook and successfully completed the development and implementation of a schoolwide discipline policy. Then the committee turned its attention to the problem in the area of communication and collegial relationships.

In reviewing the survey, the writer of this paper (a member of the committee) found seven items that seemed to be indicators of the level of communication and collegial relationships within the school, and consequently, of the school climate. A tabulation of these items is included in Appendix B. These items ranked from Ø.43 to 1.21 below the desired 3.8Ø Existence Mean. (E.M.) The survey designers had defined a 3.8 E.M. as a measure of the indicator being in existence. The average E.M. of the seven items was

3.19. The mean discrepancy (M.D.) between the respondents' perception of the indicator's importance and its existence ranged from Ø.67 to 1.34 (average M.D.=Ø.91).

Some steps were taken to improve the situation. 1) A weekly bulletin outlining activities for the coming week's was prepared by the primary specialist and distributed to the faculty. 2) The guidance counselor provided teachers with a weekly memo that reported status of students referred for placement in special groups or programs. 3) The weekly grade level team meetings were restructured so that they functioned not only to conduct team business, but also to give some feedback to the school improvement committee and the administration.

In spite of these efforts, there still existed many gaps in communication channels, especially concerning matters that affected more than one grade level. Many things simply did not get reported to the bulletin editor. Even though some grade level teams seemed to be more cohesive than in the past and began to engage in some team-wide activities, all teams continued to give evidence that they could benefit from improving interpersonal skills.

In January, 1990 the New York Effective Schools Survey (Kelly, 1988) was administered county wide for the second time. In comparing results of this survey with the 1989 survey, the writer discovered that while the area of discipline had improved significantly, the seven items concerned with communication and collegiality showed no marked improvement. Comparison of the individual items and of the composite scores for both years is shown in Appendix C. The writer initiated the practicum described in this report as another attempt to find solutions to continuing communication problems and to put into place strategies that would provide strong and open communication channels for the future.

The outcome objectives for this practicum fell into two distinct categories: 1) attitudinal and 2) practical.

1) It was the hope of the writer that a series of staff development sessions would result in members of the target group (the professional staff) having a better understanding of themselves and their patterns of interacting with others, as well as gaining an increased appreciation (or at least tolerance) for other

individuals on the staff. Such attitudinal changes should result in more productive team meetings and planning endeavors.

2) By making further improvements to the mechanisms of communication, the writer sought to facilitate the transmission of clearer, more timely information to all staff members.

Evidence that change had occurred would be demonstrated by the following:

1) At the end of the implementation period, 80 percent of the staff participating in the inservice training sessions will indicate a level of "C" (satisfactory) or better when completing a survey designed to ascertain the level of communication within the school and feelings concerning it.

2) When given a portion of the New York State Effective Schools Consortium Survey (NYS, 1987) in the spring of 1990, the staff will indicate a more positive perception of the selected indicators (Appendix B) being in place. A decrease of 0.15 in the average M.D. (0.83) will verify that a change in perception has occurred.

CHAPTER II

Research and Solution Strategy

In seeking ways to improve communication in the target school, the writer turned to the literature dealing with the topic and found that the term "communication" had a multiplicity of meanings. Communication is defined by Webster (1984) as the "giving or exchanging of information, messages, etc." CareerTrack literature (CareerTrack, 1989) defines it as "the act of expressing oneself in a way that is readily and clearly understood." Cegala (1987) states that communication is "a social phenomenon in that it entails conscious intention and attention to self, others and the evolving circumstances" (p. 82).

Countless books and studies, both popular and scholarly, published in the the last fifty years attest to the importance of communication in any endeavor which involves more than one person. A nationally recognized educational program, Parent and Teacher Effectiveness Training, based on the writing of Gordon (1970), emphasizes the importance of developing communication skills if one is to be effective in

interpersonal relationships. Cegala (1987) maintains that an individual's communication tendencies, which remain reasonable stable throughout life, affect his competence in various situations.

The importance of the role of communication in achieving success in group related tasks in the work place is also widely acknowledged. Hersey and Blanchard (1988) state that written and oral communication skills are critical in performing effectively on the job. They quote a senior executive who said:

> The best business plan is meaningless unless everyone is aware of it and pulling together to achieve its objectives. Good communications are the lifeblood of any enterprise, large or small. Communications are essential to keep our entire organization functioning at maximum levels and to make the most of our greatest management resource--our people (p.306).

In the same reference they also cite Shapiro who contends :

> It sounds banal to say that a CEO is first and foremost in the human relations and communication business- what else could the job be?-- but the point is too important to leave to inference. No other item on the chief executive's duty list has more leverage on the organization's prospects (p.316).

Communication in the workplace, in both interpersonal exchanges and in group settings, was chosen as the focus of this writer's inquiry.

Interpersonal Communication

Although communicating is an activity in which most people spend a great deal of time, the average person receives very little training in this important area. The following table (Hersey & Blanchard, p.308) illustrates this clearly.

Table 1

Communication Skills Training
(average person)

Skills	Years of Training	Extent Used in Adult Life
Writing	14	Little
Reading	8	Some
Speaking	1	Quite a bit
Listening	0	A great deal

The process of communication is a complex phenomenon involving far more than simple semantics. According to LaBorde (cited in Hersey and Blanchard, p310), in interpersonal communications, the listener perceives seven percent of a person's meaning from the words actually spoken, 38 percent from the way the words are spoken, and 55 percent from the speaker's body language. An individual's values and perceptual

filters, as well as the preferred sensory representational systems of both speaker and listener, play a part in the communication effort. (Brack,1980)

The meaning that an individual gives to an event or communication is based, not on absolute reality, but on his own perception of reality. The process of giving meaning depends on the set of values, attitudes, motives, and experiences that an individual brings to the event. Barone (1986) suggests that an open discussion of members' personal values would increase mutual trust within a working group.

Skills which could be introduced and practiced with the idea of enhancing interpersonal communication could include: 1) analysis and sharpening of self-concept, 2) development of bridge building techniques for handling emotions, 3) learning to employ defensiveness-minimizing behaviors such as tentativeness and empathy, 4) developing techniques for bridging perception gaps, 5) becoming skilled at active listening, 6) understanding the role of the axiom regarding meanings being in people, 7) developing a sensitivity to the importance of non-verbal communication, 8) developing an awareness of the four preferred sensory systems used in communication and

seeking to alternate among them and 9) understanding something of the importance of a person's basic values and how they influence perception (Owen, 1981). In-service sessions concerning any or all of these could be helpful to the target school staff.

Group Communication

Many of these same topics could be applicable to improving group communication within the school. However, the added complexities associated with dealing with several people simultaneously create new opportunities for additional learning. Among these is the development of skills in 1) group problem-solving and decision-making, 2) consensus building, and 3) conflict resolution.

The current emphasis in the business world and in schools on empowering the worker through shared decision making makes the need to possess these skills most urgent. Although there are still some decisions best made by individuals, many scholars, including Fisher and Shaw, (cited by Cegala, 1987) agree that in complex tasks, and tasks involving values, group decision-making and problem-solving is advantageous. Burleson (Burleson et al., 1984) cites Taylor and

Faust who suggest that communication among group members helps to catch and remedy errors that might slip by one individual. Collins and Guetzkow, cited by Hirokawa (1983), maintained that in the group decision process an "assembly effect" occurs. That is, the quality of group outcomes exceeds what would be expected from a simple sum of individual contributions. Hall and Watson, quoted by Burleson (1984, p.558) call the same phenomenon, "the group synergy hypothesis". Wolfe and Box (1988) refer to the research of Shaw who found this benefit along with others, which include 1) greater interest in the task by the group involved and 2) a greater amount of information available to the group.

Efforts to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of group decision making have led to many studies of small group dynamics and group communication. Cegala (1987) credits Bales and Cohen with the development of "SYMLOG", a theory and methodology for attempting to study simultaneously, a group member's individual behavior and the interacting behavioral patterns of group dynamics. Using this system, one can predict how well a group will function in regard to degree of conflict and satisfaction. Since the groups

within the target school were for the most part a given, the writer of this report rejected the use of this method.

A more promising approach for use in schools was found in LOGS, a repertoire and language of group skills, that facilitates collaborative group problem solving and decision making. This seemed to offer promise in that it allows the group to be self-directed, to identify and name its learning, and to practice it of its own accord. (Herman, 1983) According to Bednar and Battersby (as cited by Herman), this direct approach is one effective way to influence group participants to behave in new ways.

Hirokawa (1983) investigated the importance of certain task-achievement functions in group problem-solving effectiveness. The functions examined were: 1) establishment of operating procedures, 2) analysis of the group problem, 3) establishment of criteria for evaluating alternative solutions, 4) generation of alternative solutions, and 5) evaluation of alternative solutions. He found that the establishment of procedures (during the discussion) had a negative effect on the problem-solving effectiveness, while the amount of time spent analyzing the problem had a

positive effect. This finding lends support to the idea of establishing ahead of time a common language of skills and procedures, including those for reaching consensus.

One of the tenets of LOGS is the rejection of fictitious consensus and the creative use of conflict. For this to occur, group members must feel secure enough within the group to take risks. Rothwell (1986) cites Fisher who states that "engaging in risk, increasing vulnerability to fellow members of a group, is prerequisite to an effective group process." (p.182) Rothwell (1986) developed an exercise, which he called "Building Blocks", to use in developing a spirit of trust and esprit de corps within a group. It could also serve as a form of social pleasure which Shaw, cited by Wolfe and Box (1988), maintains is, along with task accomplishment, a necessity for a successful working group.

Another requirement for such a group is the presence of clear and shared goals. Goodlad (1984) cites the clarification of goals as a necessary first step in school improvement. A shared goal or clear focus is cited as essential for an effective school. (Squires, et. al., 1983). Schermerhorn (1986) says that

clear written goals are necessary for workers to do an effective job. Hersey and Blanchard (1988) contend that a set of common goals is part of the criteria for effective groups. They urge that subordinates participate in setting goals and the criteria for their evaluation, since doing so increases both the subordinates' commitment to the goals and their ownership of them. In light of the evidence, it seemed to the writer that the formation of a school mission or goal would be an appropriate activity.

In addition to providing opportunities for staff members to upgrade their communication skills through inservice training, it seemed important to the writer to give attention to the mechanics of facilitating communication within the target school. The problem here appeared to be finding ways to do this that would not make too many demands upon the time of already overburdened staff members.

Herman (1983) suggests including climate setting activities in each meeting of a group. Their purpose is to create a condition for mutual support and interdependence. In situations such as that in the target school where individuals know each other at least superficially, he suggests 1) improving the

comfort of the physical environment (for example, providing coffee in the room) and 2) allowing time for each member to share some work-related success experienced since the last meeting.

Bird and Little (1986) stress the need for teachers to have more time with their colleagues within the school day. They suggest that the time could be made available by adding to the length of the day, or by eliminating selected activities. This time would be used, among other things, for the study and improvement of the professional relations in the school.

A suggestion made by Barth (1986) is that the site for faculty meetings be rotated among the classrooms of different teachers. During the first 20 minutes of the meeting, the host teacher would share something of the activities that take place in the classroom (curriculum, grouping practices, etc.) and some of the special characteristics of the class.

While it is not within the power of the writer to influence the use of time during the school day or year, it did seem to be possible to request that faculty and team meetings be held in different places, and that individual teachers or grade level teams be given time to explain their activities.

Lambert (1988) recommends that a weekly letter to the staff be the carrier of broad information and include a weekly calendar, information about the whole school, board and district decisions, interesting ideas and practices used by the staff, congratulations, and so forth. The author also advocates the use of a school-initiated master calendar, the circulation of research studies, articles, and books, as well as open lines of communication between administration and staff. Finally, Lambert suggests the use of routinely held annual interviews with individual staff members, not for evaluation purposes, but simply to discuss professions and work at school in regard to aspirations and goals for the future.

In the writer's school, a weekly letter already existed but was not so inclusive as Lambert suggests. Many things simply did not get included because the editor was not informed of them. For the letter to become effective, it seemed that a concentrated effort must be made by teachers, and especially by team leaders, to see that events are reported, whether they seem to be of importance to others or not.

Executives of MCI (a very successful communication company) demand that, without overburdening workers

with memos and other written communication, everyone who would be at all affected by an item of information must be made aware of it. They also maintain that all information should be available if staff members want to examine it (Peters, 1990). Since, in a school situation, it is often difficult to ascertain who this will be, the writer believes it is better to err on the side of overcommunicating.

The school improvement team sought to develop strategies for dealing with those communication problems concerning which the writer could find no possible solutions in the literature. Office personnel in the target school were often besieged with calls concerning details of events of which they had not been informed. One suggestion was to designate one person in the school to serve as co-ordinator of communication. A file could be maintained in the main office which would contain a copy of each communication sent to parents. The individual initiating the message would be responsible for placing it in the file.

Another suggested strategy was a short intercom message to teachers at the beginning of their workday to remind them of the day's events and make them aware of changes in posted plans.

Proposed Strategy

From the activities reviewed in the literature and suggestions made by the staff, the writer developed the following implementation plan.

1) Use of a personality preference inventory (specifically, the Myers Briggs Inventory, 1962) and follow-up explanatory sessions. Cooper and Floor (1986) point out that a style indicator allows participants to look at "styles they and others use to take in information, process it, make decisions, communicate and solve problems"(p.32). The use of this tool could contribute to a better understanding of self, other individuals and the total group.

2) Workshop sessions built around video or audio tape series, "What You Are Is Where You Were When." (Massey, 1986). The tapes point out that the decade in which an individual forms basic life values has an influence on what those values are. For the rest of a person's life those values act as filters through which one perceives the world. Follow up activities to the tapes should allow participants to develop a better understanding and appreciation of other people. The writer felt that in light of the wide range of ages that exists in the staff, such sessions would be most

helpful.

3) Training sessions in "Listening Skills" and Non-Verbal Communication. As pointed out earlier, most adults have little or no training in this area of communication. Training sessions could be easily arranged since the school district has two certified instructors who are available to conduct sessions.

4) Use of an exercise to build trust and esprit de corps. The writer would lead the entire staff in the exercise, "Building Blocks" (Rothwell, 1986). This particular exercise was chosen because it can be completed in less than an hour, and should accomplish the desired results while providing an enjoyable and social activity for the group.

5) Additional training sessions for team leaders in team building skills, especially consensus development and conflict resolution. This group was chosen for special training because they are the ones who interact most intensely with staff members. After receiving training, they would automatically have opportunities for practicing learned skills.

6) Implementation of certain improvements in the mechanics of communication within the school.

a) Revision and revitalization of weekly letter.

b) Establishment of a master calendar for the remainder of the year.

c) Formation of a central information file in the main office.

d) Daily "Update" announcements.

e) A school bulletin board featuring different curriculum items on which all grades would post activities they were pursuing.

f) Rotation of faculty and team meeting places with hosts sharing their programs of instruction.

7) A school-wide effort at constructing a school mission statement.

CHAPTER III

Method

Initial Plan:

The implementation of the proposed strategy consisted of two distinct areas of activity. The first was a series of inservice activities which were offered to the entire school staff. An additional component of this training area was a more intensive training session in "Team Building Leadership Skills" for the school improvement team and grade level chairpersons. Original plans called for a ten week implementation period, but scheduling problems caused this to be lengthened. The schedule of the inservice training sessions for the entire faculty is given below and in Appendix D.

SCHEDULE OF INSERVICE FOR PRACTICUM PROJECT

Week 1 -Introduction to Improvement project, especially the Myers-Briggs Personality Indicator.

Week 2 - Implementation of Myers-Briggs Indicator.

Week 3 - Inservice on "Active Listening" and "Body Language."

Week 4 - Inservice: "Follow-Up to Myers-Briggs".

Week 5 - Inservice: "Follow-up to Myers-Briggs."

Week 6 - Inservice: "Final Follow-up on Myers-Briggs."

Week 7 - Grade Level Team meetings to discuss implication of Myers-Briggs for teamwork.

Week 8 - Inservice: "Values Formation"- Video cassette, Massy Triad, Part I: "What You Are Is Where You Were When".

Week 9 - Inservice: Discussion and Group Activities related to video cassette shown previous week.

Week 10 -Inservice: "Building Blocks" Exercise for developing esprit de corps and developing trust.

Week 10 -Schoolwide brainstorming session to develop school mission statement.

Week 11 -Continued group work on developing mission statement.

Week 12 -Completion of mission statement.

The second area of implementation was the improvement of the mechanics of communication within the school setting. These have been outlined on page 28 of this paper and in Appendix D. The writer had the primary responsibility for this area. Supplemental agents were the administration, who provided empowerment for the improvements, and the team leaders and school improvement committee members, who were responsible for providing, on a regular basis, information on school activities. The mechanical improvements to the school's information system were to be put in place during the first two weeks of the implementation period.

The writer recognized that in any endeavor of this magnitude there would be constant need for adjustments and revisions. The weekly meetings of the School Improvement Committee were to be used for making any necessary changes and for receiving regular feedback as to the reception of the strategy by the school staff.

Resources

With the exception of the exercise, "Building Blocks", and the sessions on value formation, the inservice workshops were led by resource people from

fist task was securing permission and funding from the Teacher Education Council. Contacting and scheduling the clinicians proved a time consuming task that involved many telephone calls. The video cassette was borrowed from a local utility firm's library. Supplies, other than the cassette and the materials for the Myers-Briggs Inventory, were easily available within the target school. They consisted of an overhead projector and screen, VCR, copiers, building blocks, chart paper, markers, and many reams of duplicating paper for handouts. The office staff and aides were most helpful in taking care of the routine paper work associated with the project.

Monitoring

The weekly meetings of the School Improvement Committee provided regular opportunities to get feedback concerning the implementation process. At approximately the same time that implementation began, the membership of this committee changed. Team leaders were replaced by representatives chosen by grade level, with an additional member representing the para-professionals on the staff. The administrators and three members of the original committee remained to

outside the school. The fees for these clinicians were paid by the Teacher Education Center of the district or by local school funds. The writer secured the video cassette, What You Are is What You were Then (Massey, 1986) and conducted the "Building Blocks" Exercise. Another teacher on the staff, who had experienced constructing a mission statement in another school, was the facilitator for this endeavor.

The inservice sessions that involved the entire staff took place before school in the time usually reserved for faculty meetings. Consequently, the the sessions had to be only forty-five minutes in length in order for teachers to be in their classrooms when students arrived. This time period was still longer than that available after students had left for the day. The additional training sessions for the team leaders and school improvement team were held in the afternoon on two consecutive Thursdays and were each one and one half hours in length. In order to stay within the provisions of the contract between the School Board and the local bargaining unit, those attending were given compensatory time.

The writer had the responsibility for arranging and co-ordinating all of the inservice sessions. The

provide continuity. This committee, along with the team leaders, who also met weekly, were invaluable to the implementation process because of their input and support.

The most serious problem encountered by the writer was the scheduling of sessions. Although the principal had set aside time on the school calendar for the inservice sessions, they often had to be canceled and rescheduled. Most of these changes were necessitated by deadlines or agendas imposed by the district office and beyond local school control. Often one or more weeks would pass between sessions. As a result the inservice sessions were pushed beyond the dedicated time period, an action which put the implementation in conflict with other previously scheduled school activities and caused further delay. The implementation period actually covered a calendar period of fifteen weeks.

The only other problem that surfaced was criticism by a few faculty members of some of the "adult" language used in the video tape. Most staff members felt that the messages contained in the tape were so important that the criticism, while noted, should be ignored. Many expressed a desire to view the remaining

tapes in the series. The presence of the potentially offensive language had been discussed by the School Improvement Committee when the use of the tape was being considered for inclusion in the practicum. Prior to the actiual showing of the video those present had been made aware of the video's content. The offended faculty members were assured that their criticism had been noted, and they apparently were somewhat satisfied. They continued to participate in the inservice.

Evaluation

A full evaluation of the results of the practicum implementation is contained in the next chapter. However, the writer feels that an evaluation (by the School Improvement Committee and this author) of the activities used should be a part of this report. The administration of the Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory and the follow-up inservice sessions proved very valuable. They provoked much enthusiastic response from faculty members, including requests for the inventory to be given to spouses of faculty members. In formal and informal conversations the characteristics and implications were widely discussed and provided improved understanding of the target

group.

The session on "Active Listening" was also well received, as was, for the most part, the video tape on value programming. Staff members expressed the desire to have more sessions like these. The two sessions on team building and conflict resolution were less enthusiastically received, although all of the participants acknowledged that the information gained was most helpful and that the handouts were excellent. It is the opinion of this writer that the time when the sessions were held (after a full workday), the personality of the consultant, and his method of presentation were deterrents to its success. The second session which involved participants in actual exercises in reaching consensus was better received than the first.

The target group's first endeavor at working in teams across grade levels was also less than successful. In the implementation of the "Building Blocks" exercise, in which two grade levels worked as a team, there was much evidence of fierce competition and the influence of strong personalities within groups. In addition, the corporate group personalities of the grade level teams seemed to affect the outcome.

When preparing the sessions devoted to developing a school mission statement, the writer and the facilitator decided to employ smaller groups (no more than four or five members at the most) with only one member, chosen at random, from a grade level team in a group. Reaching consensus required three sessions. The first week each group generated a list of behaviors, skills and attitudes that students should possess upon completing fifth grade. These group lists were compiled into a master list. The second week the staff, working in a different configuration of groups, separated the list into areas of conceptual, behavioral and affective learning domains and eliminated overlapping statements.

The third session was one in which the entire staff worked to complete a mission statement from the lists formulated in the second session. Teachers, working individually or in groups of two or three, were asked to choose one of the three domains and generate a sentence that summarized the items on their list. These sentences were then read aloud. Several were selected to combine into a mission statement, which was displayed with the use of an overhead projector. This statement was then altered until the group seemed to be

fairly pleased with the wording. A rough draft of the statement was later circulated to the entire faculty, along with a request for additional corrections or a statement of agreement. The School Improvement Team collected these, considered the proposed changes (of which there were only three or four-all minor) and resubmitted the statement to the faculty for their approval.

This final group endeavor was much more successful than the "Building Blocks" exercise had been. It is the opinion of the writer that several factors probably accounted for this success. 1) Steps were taken to insure that members of the target group worked with different individuals than those with whom they do on a daily basis. (Therefore, established group response patterns became inoperative as individuals were subjected to various points of view). 2) The groups were much smaller in number and therefore increased the individual group member's responsibility for involvement. 3) The knowledge that other schools in the district had already formulated a mission statement and were using it in planning curriculums made this activity generally acceptable to the target group. 4) Finally, the topic being discussed was one concerning

which the participants have strong opinions and interest.

The proposed improvements in the mechanics of communications met with differing levels of success. The weekly calendar letter was made more effective through additions of dates of future activities and the inclusion of items of general information needed by the staff. Constant encouragement and reminders to staff members to get needed information to the editor were necessary to make this improvement possible. Though not able to facilitate the publishing of a master calendar for the remainder of the school year, the writer was successful in compliling a handwritten one from which dates could be transferred to a large monthly calendar and given to the newsletter editor. Unfortunately, schedule changes had to be made weekly, sometimes daily, so that the calendar was never completely accurate. Daily "update" announcements were not able to be instituted on a daily basis, but were given for changes that were occuring that day.

The formation of a central information file in the main office proved more successful. Most teachers were relatively consistent in putting notices of activities into it, and the office staff had access to information

when asked for it. Rotation of places for faculty meetings seemed satisfactory to the staff, although it did not take place on a regular basis. There was one attempt at a schoolwide effort to construct multiple bulletin boards featuring topics that grade levels were studying in the social studies area. It was quite existensive and required much teacher preparation time. A more reasonable approach would probably be one board with captions identifying grade level topics.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The writer had formulated two objectives (recorded on page 12 of this report) with which to measure the success of this practicum. The summative evaluation took place at the end of the Implementation period. It consisted of two parts:

1) The Administration of a Survey designed to assess the staff's perception of the level of communication within the school. (Appendix D)
   The survey was distributed by the School Improvement team to those members of the staff who had participated in the inservice sessions. After the staff completed the survey, the writer tabulated the results to determine if 80 percent of the staff perceived communication within the school to be satisfactory. (A response in column A, B, or C would indicate satisfaction.) If this criteria had been met, the writer's first objective would have been satisfied.

2) The administration and evaluation of selected items from the New York State Effective Schools Consortium Survey of Professional Staff Perceptions of School Program. (NYS,1987)
   Teacher perception of these designated indicators (items) was then compared with their perceptions of the same items from the survey completed by the staff in January 1990. A decrease of 0.15 in the average of the D.M. of these items in the post-implementation survey would indicate that a significant improvement had occurred and that the second objective for the practicum had been met.

Upon analyzing the data, the writer found that the first objective had been successfully met. Eighty seven percent of the target group indicated a satisfaction level of C or better. Sixty-two percent of the responses lay within the level of A or B (indicating greater satisfaction). Thirteen percent of the target group found the level of communication within the school to be less than satisfactory.

A study of the responses to individual items (tabulated in Tables II and III below) revealed a more detailed picture. Ninety-three percent of the respondents indicated a high level of enjoyment when working on team projects, and 83 percent felt that staff members were generally willing to listen to each other. Seventy-three percent of those surveyed felt strongly that the administration made a deliberate effort to the staff informed. The writer sees in this response some understanding on the part of the staff that efforts to keep the staff informed of critical matters are being made by the administration.

The lowest percentages (31% for columns A+B, 66% for columns A-C) indicating satisfaction or agreement with a statement were generated by item seven which addressed willingness of staff members to deal directly

with other staff members with whom they had conflict. This situation seems to imply that the staff needs further training in conflict resolution techniques. The fact that eight of the 24 individuals who responded to item 12 acknowledged that there were four or more individuals on the staff with whom they did not communicate well seems to lend support to this conclusion.

Table II

Results of School Communication Survey
Raw Data

Question Number	Reponses A	B	C	D	E
1	6	10	11	2	1
2	9	13	5	3	0
3	7	7	10	5	0
4	5	11	8	3	2
5	1	8	10	10	0
6	5	10	10	4	0
7	13	8	8	1	0
8	11	14	5	0	0
9	12	8	5	4	1
10	12	15	1	0	1
11	3	13	9	5	0
12	6	5	5	1	7
* Totals =	84	117	82	37	5
	26%	36%	25%	11%	2%

Column A indicates strong satisfaction.
Column E indicates strong dissatisfaction.
* Totals do not include question number 12.
For question 12: A=0 to 1, B=2, C=3, D=4, E=5 or more.

Table III

Results of School Communication Survey
Totals and Percentages

Question Number	Totals (A+B)	(A+B+C)	(A+B+C+D+E)	Percentages (A+B)	(A+B+C)
1	16	27	30	53%	90%
2	22	27	30	73%	90%
3	14	24	29	48%	83%
4	16	24	29	55%	83%
5	9	19	29	31%	66%
6	15	25	29	52%	86%
7	21	29	30	70%	97%
8	25	30	30	83%	100%
9	20	25	30	67%	83%
10	27	28	29	93%	97%
11	16	25	30	53%	83%
Totals =	201	283	325	62%	87%
Percent=	62%	87%	100%		

The second objective of the practicum was to achieve a reduction of the average Mean Discrepancy of seven selected items from the New York State Effective Schools Consortium Survey of Professional Staff Perceptions of School Program (NYS, 1987). Specifically, the objective was a reduction of 0.15 of the average M.D. (0.83) that resulted from the January 1990 administration of the survey. This objective was not achieved. Although there were marked differences

in the individual items, their average M.D. of Ø.83 remained the same in both the January and May survey.

When these results were compared item by item with those of the two previous surveys, the writer found that a reduction in the M.D. had occurred between the April 1989 and January 1990 survey. A decrease of Ø.11 (from Ø.94 M.D. to Ø.83 M.D.) was evident. A comparison of the data from all three surveys is displayed in Table IV.

According to the creators of the survey, positive change is indicated in three measures. They are: 1) increased existence, 2) decreased need (Mean Discrepancy), and 3) increase in both importance and existence (even though it increases in a rise in the M.D.). This third measure is regarded as positive because of the belief that heightened perception is necessary for positive change to occur. Although the writer had utilized only the second of these measures in formulation of an objective, it seemed prudent to analyze the individual items in relationship to the other two measures.

Item one showed a positive change according to all three measures, as did items three, six and seven. The largest gain in Existence Mean occurred in item three

which dealt with recognition of individuals for service to others. Item seven, concerning existence of a school mission statement, presented the largest decrease in M.D. (from 1.05 to 0.74). Item one, concerned with the presence of collaborative planning and shared decision making, exhibited a gain of 0.22 in E.M. Since all of the above items had been addressed in the practicum implementation, the writer viewed them as having been somewhat influenced by it. Although the responses to item six indicated only insignificant gains, the writer did note that in the period between the initial survey of April 1989 and that given in January 1990, the staff morale, as perceived by the staff, had improved (from M.D.1.34 to M.D.0.93). This perception may have been affected positively by the initial efforts toward improvement made earlier in the school year.

Items two, four and five did not show any statistical improvement. However, all three did indicate a gain in the Importance Mean, perhaps indicating that at least a heightened perception of importance had occurred. The fact that all three of these involve collegial working relationships seems to indicate that the staff needs to have more training in

Table IV

A Comparison of Perceptions of Selected Items (from New York State Effective Schools Survey) over a 15 Month Period.

Question Number		Results Apr 89	Jan 90	May 90	Gains and losses * Apr-Jan	Jan-May	Apr-May
1	I.M.	3.97	4.15	4.20	.18	.05	.23
	E.M.	3.30	3.15	3.37	-.15	.22	.07
	M.D.	.67	1.00	.83	-.33	-.17	.16
2	I.M.	4.10	4.18	4.37	.08	.19	.27
	E.M.	3.32	3.54	3.47	.22	-.07	.15
	M.D.	.78	.64	.90	-.14	.26	.12
3	I.M.	3.58	3.38	3.76	-.20	.38	.18
	E.M.	2.59	2.92	3.55	.33	.63	.96
	M.D.	.99	.46	.21	-.53	-.25	-.78
4	I.M.	4.29	4.18	4.30	-.11	.12	.01
	E.M.	3.33	3.39	3.30	.06	-.09	-.03
	M.D.	.96	.79	1.00	-.17	.21	.04
5	I.M.	4.15	4.22	4.47	.07	.25	.32
	E.M.	3.37	3.34	3.30	-.03	-.04	-.07
	M.D.	.78	.88	1.17	.10	.29	.39
6	I.M.	4.57	4.46	4.47	-.11	.01	-.10
	E.M.	3.23	3.50	3.53	.27	.03	.30
	M.D.	1.34	.96	.93	-.38	-.03	-.41
7	I.M.	4.26	4.28	4.43	.02	.15	.17
	E.M.	3.22	3.23	3.69	.01	.46	.47
	M.D.	1.04	1.05	.74	.01	-.31	-.30

I.M. = Importance Mean
E.M. = Existence Mean
M.D. = Discrepancy Mean
* A negative M.D. indicates improvement.

CHAPTER V

Recommendations

Although this practicum was not completely successful, in that only one of the stated objectives was achieved, the implementation did provide impetus for school improvement and helped to create a climate in which it can take place. As a result of its limited success in improving communication and collegial relationships in the target school, the School Improvement Team is planning to implement inservice training that will build upon the skills that the staff has acquired. Topics that have been suggested for study include "Teaching to Students' Learning Preferences", "Conducting Successful Parent Conferences", and "The Effects of Teacher Expectation on Student Achievement".

In addition to this training the improvement team is recommending to the faculty the expansion of shared decision making through the extensive use of teacher-led committees composed of members from the entire school community, including parents and non-instructional staff. A document has been prepared

which gives the following for each committee: the proposed membership, the purpose and responsibilities, and the anticipated time frame in which it will operate. As soon as teaching assignments have been announced for next year, the plan will be presented to the faculty along with the request that individuals sign up for the committee (or committees) of their choice. Such small group involvement should provide many opportunities for collegial relationships to improve.

The entire practicum project could be transported to another school site where similar needs exist. Its implementation would be enhanced if the administration and a large number of staff members have a deep commitment to school improvement since the project will require at least ten hours of staff time. Securing the early support of the school district in regard to providing inservice resources would be advantageous. The support of the faculty will be gained more easily if arrangements can be made for them to receive credit toward recertification for the inservice. A final recommendation would be that those in charge of the practicum realize that the dynamics of a school will necessitate many schedule changes and

prepare themselves to be very flexible in regard to a time frame. The earlier in the school year that implementation begins the less likely it will be to encounter conflicts, since activities seem to escalate during the spring quarter.

An extension of this project which might prove helpful to other schools and fill a need in the school district would be a compilation of community resource people qualified to conduct training in the area of communication, interpersonal relationships and small group dynamics. This could be accompanied by a printout which would contain a description of the inservice workshops, a list of materials needed, and samples of evaluation instruments used. An annotated summary of improvements suggested for enhancing the mechanics of communication within a school setting could also be included.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Distribution of Target School Staff

Appendix A

Distribution of Target School Staff

Administrators:	1 principal
	1 assistant principal
Kindergarten:	5 teachers
	1 aide
Junior First:	1 teacher (shares kindergarten aide.
First Grade:	5 teachers
	1 aide
Second Grade:	5 teachers
	Ø.5 aide
Third Grade:	4 teachers
	Ø.5 aide
Fourth Grade:	4 teachers
	Ø.5 aide
Fifth Grade:	4 teachers
	Ø.5 aide

Support Staff

Art teacher
Guidance Counselor
Media Specialist
Music teacher
P.E. teacher
Primary Specialist

Exceptional Student Services

Emotionally Handicapped Class: 1 teacher, 1 aide
Gifted Class: 1 teacher
Pre-kindergarten Handicapped: 2 teachers, 2 aides
Specific Learning Disabilities Class: 1.5 teachers
Speech Therapist

Non-instructional

3 secretaries
5 lunchroom workers
4 custodians

Appendix B

Appendix B

Selected Items from New York State Effective Schools Consortium Survey of Professional Staff Perceptions of School Program

Teacher/Staff Effectiveness

36. Collaborative curriculum planning and decision making exist within the building.

I.M.	E.M.	M.D.
3.97	3.30	0.67

59. Collegial working relationships exist among all professional staff.

I.M.	E.M.	M.D.
4.10	3.32	.78

119. Rewards for teachers and students recognize service to others as well as personal achievement.

I.M.	E.M.	M.D.
3.58	2.59	0.99

Planning Proces

14. At the principal's initiative, teachers work together to effectively coordinate the instructional program within and between grades.

I.M.	E.M.	M.D.
4.29	3.33	.96

15. Planning is a collaborative process involving administrators, teachers, and other professional staff.

I.M.	E.M.	M.D.
4.15	3.37	.78

Climate

3. There is evidence of high staff morale.

I.M.	E.M.	M.D.
4.57	3.23	1.34

12. There is a clearly articulated mission of the school through which the entire staff shares an understanding and commitment to learning goals.

I.M.	E.M.	M.D.
4.26	3.22	1.04

Appendix C

School Communication Survey

Appendix C

School Communication Survey

This is an effort to assess the communication level within the school. Please respond to the statements below. A check in column A indicates strong agreement that the statement is true. A check in the column E indicates strong disagreement.

	Statements	Response A	B	C	D	E
1.	I feel adequately informed of most activities that take place in the school.	--	--	--	--	--
2.	The administration makes a deliberate effort to inform the staff of matters that are of importance to them.	--	--	--	--	--
3.	The talk in the faculty lounge is usually positive and constructive.	--	--	--	--	--
4.	When staff members have a concern with the administration, they usually go directly to the person and express it.	--	--	--	--	--
5.	Staff members who have concerns with other personnel usually go directly to the person involved.	--	--	--	--	--
6.	Support staff (secretaries aides, custodians, and lunchroom workers) generally feel accepted and communicated with on a equal level with teachers.	--	--	--	--	--
7.	Staff members generally show concern for each other.	--	--	--	--	--
8.	Staff members generally are willing to listen to each other.	--	--	--	--	--
9.	Staff members frequently praise each other.	--	--	--	--	--
10.	I enjoy working on projects with other members of my team.	--	--	--	--	--
11.	Other staff members are aware of and appreciate my contribution to the school's success.	--	--	--	--	--

12. There are approximately 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or more (circle one) staff members with whom I do not communicate well.

Appendix D

SCHEDULE OF INSERVICE FOR PRACTICUM PROJECT

Appendix D

SCHEDULE OF INSERVICE FOR PRACTICUM PROJECT

Week 1 -Introduction to Improvement project, especially the Myers-Briggs Personality Indicator.

Week 2 - Implementation of Myers-Briggs Indicator.

Week 3 - Inservice on "Active Listening" and "Body Language."

Week 4 - Inservice: "Follow-Up to Myers-Briggs".

Week 5 - Inservice: "Follow-up to Myers-Briggs."

Week 6 - Inservice: "Final Follow-up on Myers-Briggs."

Week 7 - Grade Level Team meetings to discuss implication of Myers-Briggs for teamwork.

Week 8 - Inservice: "Values Formation"- Video cassette, Massy Triad, Part I: "What You Are Is Where You Were When".

Week 9 - Inservice: Discussion and Group Activities related to video cassette shown previous week.

Week 10 -Inservice: "Building Blocks" Exercise for developing esprit de corps and developing trust.

Week 10 -Schoolwide brainstorming session to develop school mission statement.

Week 11 -Continued group work on developing mission statement.

Week 12 -Completion of mission statement.

END

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